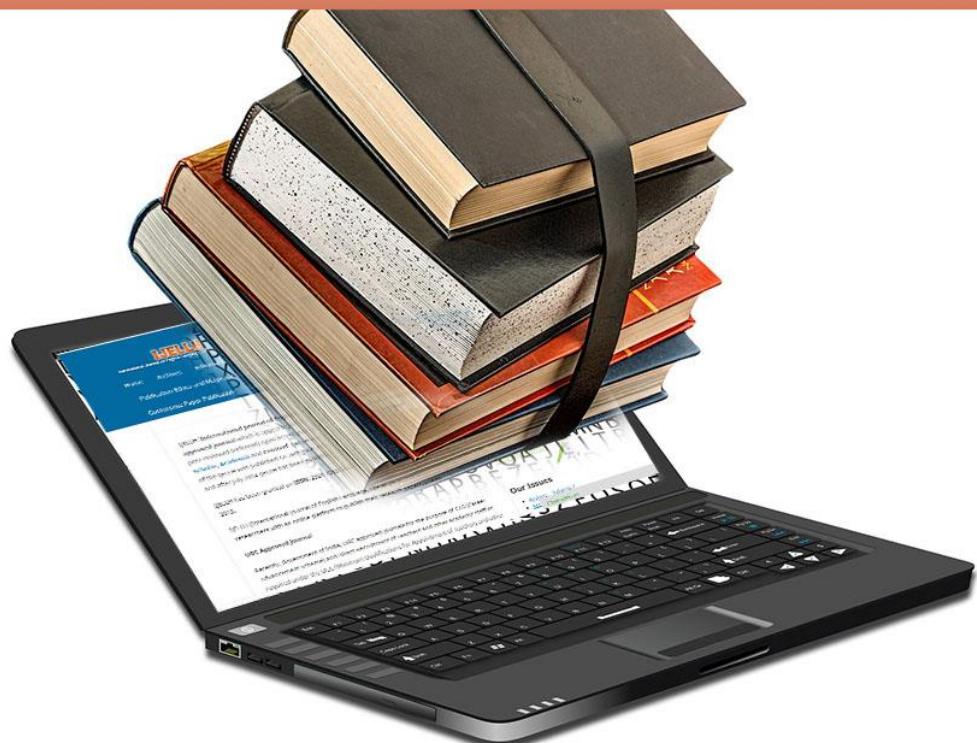


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## **A Brief Introduction to Rumi and the Thought of “Oneness” In Rumi and Emerson**

### **Abstract**

Rumi, one of the bestselling poets in America, was a great teacher and a jurist. He is one of the famous influential figures in the history of Persia, currently known as Iran. His greatest work ‘Mathnawi’ is a collection of poems written in Persian that contains 25000 verses on how to reach spiritual perfection through absolute love for God. Rumi and Ralph Waldo Emerson, a leading American philosopher, viewed all religious groups as equal before God. Rumi and Emerson emphasised on pluralism - the belief that there is not one consistent set of religious truths about the world and that all religions can work in harmony in a single society. Emerson shared a similar belief with Rumi that all religions have great value and are more similar to one another than they are dissimilar. Thus we find the common theme of ‘oneness’ in the writings of two mystical figures, Rumi and Emerson.

**Keywords:** Rumi, Emerson, oneness, God, religion.

### **Introduction**

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi was a 13th century Persian poet, an Islamic dervish and a Sufi mystic. He is regarded as one of the greatest spiritual masters and poetical intellects, a

philosopher and top Islamic scholar of his time. Born in 1207 AD, he belonged to a family of learned theologians. But he's most popularly known for his timeless Poetry that sprang from his yearning for the Divine. What is astonishing is that he's the best selling poet in America. Even outselling giants of English literature like Shakespeare. Rumi was already a teacher and a theologian, when in 1244 AD he came across a wandering dervish named Shamsuddin of Tabriz. The meeting proved to be a turning point in his life. It is one of the most memorable encounters in the history of Sufism.

### Rumi's Work

Rumi's major work is Mathnavi Manavi (spiritual couplets). Soon after his spiritual friend Shams appeared in his life, Rumi started his marvellous work, Mathnavi. Mathnavi is a "kind of narrative poetry, internal rhyme of all distichs, which changes with each following line" It consists of twenty-seven thousand verses. It was written in couplets and collected into six large volumes. Rumi's six-volume masterpiece, Mathnavi, also may be said to have had only a single purpose: communion with the Absolute. The Mathnavi, has often been called "the Quran in the Persian language."

The Mathnavi was translated into English by Professor R. A. Nicholson and he characterised Rumi as 'the greatest mystic poet of any age'. The Mathnavi expresses Rumi's burning love, refined spirits, fine intelligence and lofty mysticism through the form of linked stories. Jalal al-Din Rumi is said to have been forty-three years engaged in writing the Mathnavi. Often whole nights were spent in its composition, Rumi reciting and his friend Husam al-Din copying it down and sometimes singing portions of the verse in his beautiful voice. R.A Nicholson (1925-40) in praise of Mathnavi said: "This is the Book of the Mathnavi, which is the root of the roots of the roots of the (Mohammedan) Religion in respect of (its)

unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty; and which is the greatest science of God and the clearest (religious) way of God and the most manifest evidence of God.'

Mathnavi is the hand-book of all Sufis, the law-book and ritual of all the mystics. From this work, says Von Hammer, this volcanic eruption of inspiration, breaks forth the inmost peculiarity of Oriental mysticism, a solitary self-direction towards the loftiest goal of perfection over the contemplative way of Divine Love.

Rumi's other major work is the Divane Kabir (great work) or Divane Shams (The Works of Shams of Tabriz); because Rumi used his friend's name as his pen name, and consisting of over forty thousand couplets, this is a monumental work of divine lyricism. The Divan is a remarkable piece of literature in that it translates the author's ecstatic experiences directly into poetry. William C. Chittick (2005) for explaining the value of divan has made this statement: "It is well known that most of the ghazals (or "lyric poems of love") of the Diwan were composed spontaneously by Mawlana during the sama' or "mystical dance." This dance, which later came to be known as the "dance of the whirling dervishes," is an auxiliary means of spiritual concentration employed by the Mevlevi order, a means which, it is said, was originated by Rumi himself".

The vast ocean of Rumi's poems were able to reunite his admirers who came from different backgrounds on the love of art, beauty, diversity, and tolerance. That was Rumi's main message to the people of his time, and the people of the future generations; to focus on our spiritual relation with God, and to always strengthen our spiritual relations with one another.

Rumi was trying to remind all, that despite our differences, we were created by a single God, with whom our spiritual connection will affect our unilateral vision of each other,

allowing us to accept each other despite the differences. God, after all, created us in a diverse way, and the world can't run but through respect for such diversity.

Rumi's message pierced the boundaries of its age, and reached millions of today's generations who found in his poetry a clear example of modesty, beauty, tolerance, and reason.

His message was Universal

*"I looked in temples, churches and mosques.*

*But I found the Divine within my heart."*

And on Inner Transformation, he says

*"Yesterday I was clever, and I wanted to change the world*

*Today I am wise, and I want to change myself."*

The history of Persian Sufi poetry was called by A. J. Arberry "the golden era". The term golden era was coined because the greatest Sufi poets who created the most influential poems all lived in Persia. Sufi poetry has had a great effect in persian poetry as Reynold Nicholson's statement shows: "Sufism has few ideas, but an inexhaustible wealth and variety of illustration. Sufism or Tasawwuf is "the esoteric or inward aspect of Islam" They prefer meditations and ecstasies of mysticism to the pleasures of the world. Their fundamental tenets consist of the existence of absolutely nothing but God: that the human soul is an emanation from His essence and it will finally be restored to Him.

The Thought of "Oneness" in Rumi and Emerson:

It is a matter of common knowledge that the American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson, the 19th century Christian transcendentalist from Boston, Massachusetts, was deeply influenced by the oriental thought. The Sufi poets held a prominent position in shaping the course of his poetics. Rumi's and Emerson's similar thoughts on religious tolerance, love and

care for the soul can help bridge the ever-growing chasm between the West and the Muslim world.

Both Rumi and Emerson viewed all religious groups as equal before God. If they were still alive today, neither would have a problem praying in a house of worship outside of their own religious tradition. In their poetry, essays and lectures, Rumi and Emerson encouraged people to search for their own personal connection with God through existential and wondrous ways. Their love for everyone and everything, regardless of who or what they were, shows that non-Muslims and Muslims are not as different as many people imagine.

Rumi did not judge people through a narrow interpretation of God. Instead he emphasized what we would today call pluralism, or the belief that there is not one consistent set of religious truths about the world and that all religions can work in harmony in a single society. Similarly, Rumi emphasized that there are many ways through which people can come into contact with God and that Islam is not the sole path to the hereafter.

Rumi's fondness for interfaith dialogue between people of different faiths is visible in one of his quatrains, in which he notes that:

*There is a path from me to you*

*that I am constantly looking for,*

*so I try to keep clear and still*

*as water does with the moon.*

*This moment this love comes to rest in me,*

*many beings in one being.*

*In one wheat grain a thousand sheaf stacks.*

*Inside the needles eye, a turning night of stars.*

Rumi not only respected Christian teachings, but he also greatly admired the life and values shared by Jesus. In essence, for Rumi, all religions were more or less equally beautiful because they all sought the divine truth:

*I am neither Christian, nor Jewish, nor Muslim*

*I am not of the East, nor of the West...*

*I have put duality away, I have seen the two worlds as one;*

*One I seek, One I know, One I see, One I call*

(Divan-I Shams-I Tabriz, II)

Rumi also cared not so much for religious differences and divisions but rather the “oneness” in everything. In theory, he believed that God existed before the creation of all religions and it is this universal idea of “oneness” in God that the human family should celebrate.

Rumi’s emphasis on the oneness of humanity is found in one of his poems, conveniently titled “All Religions are but one:”

*Since the object of praise is one,*

*from this point of view,*

*all religions are but one religion.*

*Know that all praise belongs to the Light of God*

*and is only lent to created forms and beings.*

*Should people praise anyone but the One*

*who alone deserves to be praised?*

*But they go astray in useless fantasy.*

*The Light of God in relation to phenomena*

*is like light shining upon a wall —  
the wall is but a focus for these splendors.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson devoted his young adulthood to studying Christian theology. Throughout his life Emerson had a particular interest for Hindu spirituality. In fact, it is said that much of his philosophy is based on the theme of “oneness”. One of the key components of Emerson’s transcendental philosophy is non-duality, which essentially means “not two.” For Emerson, the concept of “oneness” could be found in all nations, in which “there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental Unity.” “This tendency,” he stated in his journal, “finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian scriptures, in the Vedas, the Bhagavat Gita, and the Vishnu Purana...” On several different occasions, Emerson singled out the Bhagavat Gita, which to him was “an empire of thought” and “the voice of an old intelligence.” This affection for Eastern philosophy no doubt proves that Emerson would be a major proponent of pluralism and interfaith dialogue if he were alive today. Emerson, however, did not limit his non-Christian exploration to Hindu scripture. He also translated roughly 700 lines of Persian poetry, most of which was written by the Sufi poet Hafiz, whom he described as a hero and “a name of anecdote and courage... [a sally] of freedom.”

In addition to being open to ideas in other religions, Rumi and Emerson were also strong proponents of the power of love. Rumi’s poetry, for example, was only possible after his deeply felt personal experiences of God’s love. James Cowan, an internationally renowned author, stated that Rumi was “possessed by such an overwhelming vision of love, that he was unable to confine himself to any one spiritual discipline for his inspiration.” Rumi’s poem “Love is the Master,” supports Cowan’s thesis:

*Love is the One who masters all things;*

*I am mastered totally by Love.*

*By my passion of love for Love...*

Like Rumi, Emerson was also passionate about the overwhelming feeling of love. His thoughts and feelings, which were brilliantly expressed in his essays and poems, make one feel as if he or she is empowered and uplifted. For Emerson, all living beings experience love in one form or another.

Emerson's famous poem "Give All to Love" echoes Rumi:

*Give all to love;*

*Obey thy heart;*

*Friends, kindred, days,*

*Estate, good fame,*

*Plans, credit and the muse;*

*Nothing refuse.*

In this poem, Emerson encouraged his readers to extend love to all things and to never refuse love. Later in the poem, he stated that those who focus on love and loving are "wise and [are] becoming wiser." To him, one cannot be loved unless he or she give love to others.

Emerson's theory of "oneness" is most clear in his essay "Over-soul," which he argued that mankind should be united like "the water of the globe, [being] all one, and, truly seen, its tide is one." The topic of the soul is in fact one of the main sources of truth and the catalyst of

spiritual growth for Emerson: “Within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related, the eternal One.”

## Conclusion

The world today is rife with suffering, mistrust, and wars, but by turning to the writings of Rumi and Emerson, we can find inspiration to build a stronger bridge between East and West, between Muslims and non-Muslims. In Rumi and Emerson we have a confluence of civilizations, not a clash of them. As Rumi said in his poem “Look at Love:”

*why are you so busy  
with this or that or good or bad  
pay attention to how things blend.*

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